

What a Scary Doctor Did to Me

I went in for a breast enhancement—and came out wondering what, exactly, had happened while I was knocked out.

By Cherie Witter Walton
as told to Hillary Quinn

■ I've always been proud of my body—so proud, in fact, that when I was 21, I began to appear in photo spreads and even centerfolds in *Playboy* magazine, gaining exposure that brought me other modeling work. But over the next few years, I had three daughters—and with each child, my breasts became smaller and droopier, and the modeling offers dwindled.

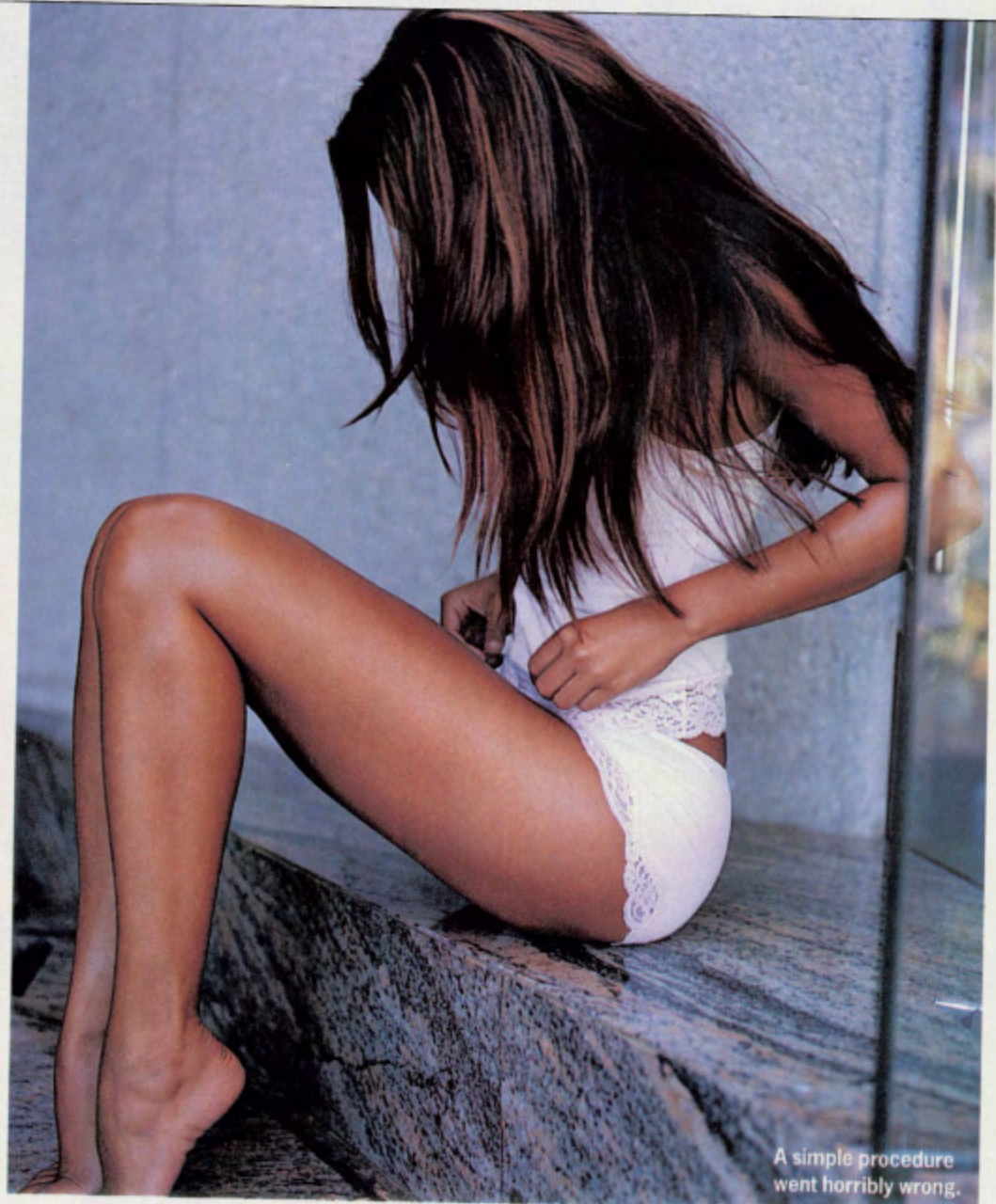
So in 1995, having tried every method I came across to create more muscle tone, I decided to take the big step: breast augmentation. I didn't want to be a spectacle—I simply wanted to be a 34C again.

A referral service listed in the yellow pages gave me the names of three different doctors in the Seattle area, where I was living at the time. Naively, I assumed the referrals were from other physicians and patients. Only later did I learn that the M.D.'s had simply paid to have their names listed.

An Uneasy Feeling

I'll never forget my first appointment with the doctor I chose, Gregory Johnson. Dr. Johnson's office, in Kirkland, a wealthy suburb of Seattle, was outfitted with a piano, a waterfall, and marble floors. I thought, *This guy's doing extremely well.*

The nurse led me into an exam room and instructed me to take off my bra and



A simple procedure went horribly wrong.

slip into a paper gown that opened in front. Then Dr. Johnson entered alone. We talked for a minute. I told him I had lost my breast tissue nursing children and wanted to go back to a 34C. He opened my top, looked at my breasts, and started touching them. He was making me extremely uncomfortable.

He stood me in front of a mirror and showed me implants that would make me a C cup. He also showed me larger ones—a DD, I'd guess—and told me that at 5 feet 9 inches, I could handle much larger breasts. I told him I didn't want to look like that. Finally, I dressed and we talked in his office. Although I had some reservations, they vanished when I noticed the Bible on his desk. When Dr. Johnson quoted me a price of \$5,162, I wrote the check that day. We scheduled the surgery

“His touch made me extremely uncomfortable.”

for a few days later. He gave me some prescriptions—for a sedative I would take the morning of the surgery and painkillers and antibiotics I would need after.

Vague Memories and Sharp Pain

The morning of the operation, Ralph, my then-boyfriend, drove me to Dr. Johnson's office because the medication had made me woozy. My next clear memory is of Ralph parking in front of our hotel near the doctor's office. I woke up about six hours later in extreme pain. I had odd abdominal

cramping and excessive vaginal discharge. Ralph told me—much later—that I also complained that my anus hurt.

My breasts were much bigger than I had asked for, and I was in such agony over the next 24 hours that Ralph called Dr. Johnson's office. He agreed to see me the next day. "Why am I so huge?" I asked him. "Please tell me I'm not going to stay this big." I looked like a freak.

While I was in the examining room, Dr. Johnson stepped out and told Ralph—but not me—that I would need a second surgery immediately. The next thing I knew, he was inserting an IV into my hand. Still groggy, I asked, "What's going on? Is there an emergency with my breasts?" Then I was out. When I came to, the doctor wheeled me to the garage, where Ralph was waiting with the car.

"A Doctor Doesn't Talk This Way"

Four or five days later, I had a second post-operative visit, and Dr. Johnson said that during the second surgery he performed an open capsulotomy—a procedure to remove the buildup of scar tissue, which, he claims, was the source of my pain. According to plastic surgeons I've talked with since, however, scar tissue takes weeks to form.

On my next visit, Dr. Johnson told me he needed to perform yet another surgery, supposedly to lower one of my breasts. I was beginning to regret having the augmentation at all; I thought God was punishing me for altering my body, for being vain. I refused to submit to a third operation. He attempted to persuade me again on the post-op visit after that, and when I balked again, he became angry. "Why are you questioning me?" he demanded. I thought, *Uh-oh. Something is wrong here. A doctor does not speak to a patient this way.* It was the last appointment I kept.

The Charges Fly

Meanwhile, my breasts looked worse. Dr. Johnson had assured me they'd get smaller, but months after the surgery, they were still huge, and now they were also uneven.

One day two years after the surgery, my

brother Curt called. "Cherie," he said, "I just heard on the news that Dr. Johnson has been arrested for raping one of his former patients." I started crying hysterically and called the Kirkland Police to tell them I was a former patient of Dr. Johnson—and that I suspected he may also have done something to me.

The former patient reported Dr. Johnson for allegedly inserting an IV against her will, putting her to sleep, and raping her with a champagne bottle. She had the bruises—and the horrible cervical trauma—to prove it. Other former patients—about 60 women in all—came forward with complaints of medical malpractice and abuse.

I was not asked to testify, but I went to Dr. Johnson's trial every day and sat directly behind him. Although he was convicted and served time for assault, two separate juries failed to deliver a unanimous verdict on the rape charge.

All My Scars

The most difficult part of this ordeal is accepting that I will never know for sure what Dr. Johnson did to me during those surgeries. Because of amnesia-causing drugs I believe Dr. Johnson used on me, I will never be able to prove anything against him criminally. But the fact that he ruined my breasts is undeniable. For that reason, I've decided to sue him in civil court for medical malpractice. My case goes to trial this month.

Meanwhile, I try to stay focused on other things. I keep busy these days working out, as well as with my three children and my family. I'm also doing a *Playboy* promotion for former centerfolds.

And I do everything I can to help other patients avoid my fate. I would encourage anyone considering plastic surgery to check her doctor out with a professional, board-certifying organization and to speak with that doctor's other patients. If he won't give you names, tell him good-bye. He shouldn't have anything to hide.

Ultimately, I'd like to open some type of safe house for women who have been sexually assaulted. Then, at least, I could believe that, for me and for others, something positive has come out of my experience. ■

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